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Eminent attorney Belin dies

D.M. lawyer played key role in JFK probe

By **JEFF HANSEL**
Register Staff Writer
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David W. Belin, one of Iowa's best-known lawyers and a key figure in the federal government's investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, died Sunday at the Mayo Clinic.

Mr. Belin, 70, was injured on Jan. 5 after falling in his hotel room in Rochester, Minn. He was there for a routine physical examination at the Mayo Clinic, friends said.

Mr. Belin was senior partner in the Belin Lamson McCormick Zumbach Flynn law firm of Des Moines. He also was a part-owner of Partnership Press Inc., a company that owns the Ames Tribune and other newspapers.

In 1964, Mr. Belin was one of 14 lawyers who were selected by Earl Warren, chief justice of the United States, to assist the Warren Commission in investigating the Kennedy assassination. Mr. Belin later wrote two books about the assassination, "November 22, 1963: You Are the Jury" and "Final Disclosure."

In the 34 years after the commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in shooting Kennedy, Mr. Belin became one of the most vocal defenders of the commission against movie-makers and book authors who suggested that Oswald was part of a conspiracy. Mr. Belin wrote articles for national newspapers and magazines defending the Warren Commission, and he appeared on national television programs in an attempt to lay the persistent conspiracy theories to rest.

Michael Gartner of Des Moines, Mr. Belin's friend and business partner, said Mr. Belin was most proud, professionally, of his work with the Warren Commission. He was also proud of having been selected in 1975 by President Gerald Ford as executive director of the Rockefeller Commission, a group convened to study the CIA's activities in the United States, said Gartner, editor of the Ames

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Mr. Belin had a lifelong interest in education. His first wife, Connie, who died in 1980, served on the Iowa Board of Regents. After her death, Mr. Belin joined other donors in forming the Connie Belin and Jacqueline Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Iowa. The center is nationally recognized for the work it does to promote special programs for bright students.

Nicholas Colangelo, director of the center, said Mr. Belin's commitment to gifted children in Iowa had a significant impact.

"He touched the lives of a lot of people, not only in Iowa, but around the world," Colangelo said. "It was through [his] commitment and effort that Iowa has a lot now happening for gifted and talented students."

Mr. Belin was more than just a skillful lawyer and successful businessman. He was also an accomplished violinist, Gartner said. "He loved to play the violin and he loved to listen to symphony music. He could have been a concert violinist."

Playing violin was a form of relaxation for Mr. Belin, who began playing at age 2½, Gartner said.

Mr. Belin was born in Washington, D.C., and moved to Sioux City as a child. After graduating from high school, he received his undergraduate, master of business administration and law degrees at the University of Michigan. He had lived in Des Moines since the 1950s.

Roger Stetson, president of the Belin law firm, said Mr. Belin kept offices in Des Moines and New York, where his wife, Barbara Ross, president of Barbara Ross Interior Design Inc., lived with their dog "Iowa."

"David was an unusual individual in the sense that he really did an outstanding job of balancing a professional life, but also maintaining time for his family," Stetson said.

Mr. Belin played an active role in the law firm until his death. "He considered himself to be a counselor and a friend to his clients, rather than just a lawyer," Stetson said.

Mr. Belin served on numerous nonprofit groups' boards, including Phi Beta Kappa Associates, the

University of Michigan Alumni Association, the National Association for Gifted Children and the Jewish Outreach Institute. He was listed three times by the National Law Journal as one of the 100 most influential lawyers in the United States.

Rabbi Sanford Seltzer of Boston said Mr. Belin was an important friend to Reform Judaism and a champion of outreach efforts to people not of the Jewish faith. Mr. Belin established a center for the study of interfaith marriage at City University in New York, he said.

Mr. Belin is survived by three sons and two daughters from his first marriage, and his wife Barbara.

Services will be Wednesday at Temple B'Nai Jeshurun, 5101 Grand Ave. in Des Moines. A service time had not been decided Sunday.

The family requests that no flowers be sent. Instead, donations may be made in Mr. Belin's name to the center for gifted education at the University of Iowa or to the Jewish Outreach Institute in New York City.

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